

Debate and Motions on the House Floor: Allocation of Time

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Summary

One of the most defining aspects of consideration of measures in the House and Committee of the Whole is that time is always controlled. There is virtually no circumstance under which a Member speaks on the floor without first knowing in advance how long has been allocated. Ranging from one minute or less to 60 minutes, debate limitations exist on all aspects of floor consideration.

This report, one of a series on legislative process, addresses time limitations associated with selected House floor procedures. Actions that are not debatable, such as the motion to adjourn, the motion to table, and the motion to rise, are not included.

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Table I. Debate Limitations in the House and Committee of the Whole

Parliamentary Situation	Time Allocated	Comments
Suspension of the rules	40 minutes maximum, equally divided between majority and minority Members	If ranking committee Member supports the measure, another Member who opposes it can claim control of half time
Special rule	60 minutes maximum, unless previous question not ordered	30 minutes customarily yielded to minority floor manager for debate only
Motion to discharge a measure	20 minutes, equally divided between proponent and opponent	
Conference report	60 minutes, equally divided between proponent and opponent	If minority floor manager supports the report, another Member may claim time, dividing it 20 minutes each for those two and the majority floor manager
Motion to instruct conferees	60 minutes, equally divided between proponent and opponent	Prerogative of minority party Member; if committee chair and ranking member support the motion, another Member may control one-third of time
Motion to recommit	10 minutes, unless majority floor manager asks that time be extended to one hour	Time equally divided between proponent and opponent
Amendments offered in Committee of the Whole (including pro forma amendments)	5 minutes, unless special rule allocates differently	Time cannot be reserved
Questions of personal privilege	60 minutes	
Questions of privileges of the House	60 minutes, equally divided between proponent and opponent	
Special orders	5 minutes until midnight; 60 minutes until midnight on Tuesday, or midnight (whichever comes first) on other days	Total time limited to 2 hours for majority and minority
Morning Hour debate	30 minutes per side; each Member reserves up to 5 minutes	

Point of
order/Parliamentary inquiry

Members may be heard at discretion of, and
time controlled by, presiding officer

May be made in House or
Committee of the Whole

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